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Communists Wouldn't Be Merciful in the South

It is very reassuring indeed to be informed by a variety of Washington armchair experts on Vietnam that predictions of a "bloodbath" if the Communists take over in that country are a myth that need not be taken seriously by anyone.

This convenient finding — which is made in support of George McGovern's proposals to surrender South Vietnam to Communist rule — holds that President Nixon had it all wrong when he estimated in 1971 that perhaps a half-million people were exterminated by the North Vietnamese after they took over from the French in 1954.

Still another Vietnam "scholar," one Gareth Porter of Cornell University, has come forth to challenge the authority for that estimate. Its origin, he says, was a book published in 1964 by a North Vietnamese exile named Hoang Van Chi which was financed by the CIA, is filled with "fraudulent documentation" and is a "totally unreliable account, the intention of which was plainly not historical accuracy, but propaganda against North Vietnam . . ."

Hoang Van Chi himself, who

now works for the training center of the State Department, admits that his figure of a half-million casualties was "just a guess — an estimate that nobody could figure." And so it is concluded by the armchair experts that the whole idea of a bloodbath in the South is a fake and a myth, concocted for propaganda purposes.

Well, on this basis, we have been living quite a while with a number of myths.

We can only guess, for example, at how many Jews were exterminated in Germany under Hitler's Third Reich. There is no one who can tell you within a few million or so how many Russians were liquidated by Joseph Stalin during the 1930s. There are no reliable figures — and much dispute — over the numbers killed in China or North Korea as the Communists consolidated their power in those countries — or how many within a factor of 10 in Biafra and Bangladesh.

One may wonder, too, just how relevant what happened in North Vietnam after 1954 may be to what would happen in South Vietnam if the Com-

munist took over there. However many were exterminated, it might be pointed out that these were people who elected to remain under the Communist regime. Under the terms of the Geneva agreement with the French, anyone who wanted to leave North Vietnam to live in the South was free to do so. And nearly 1 million, out of a population of 15 million, elected to leave their homes.

In 1954, then, Ho Chi Minh was consolidating his hold on a population presumably solidly united behind him in his fight against French colonial rule. Many others in addition to Hoang Van Chi have reached the conclusion that he did not go about it gently. A 1967 report of the Senate Republican Policy Committee (a report, incidentally, highly critical of our involvement in the war) notes that:

"Those who opposed his rule were killed. At least 50,000, perhaps as many as 100,000 were slaughtered. A peasant uprising was put down brutally. Small landowners — many of them with only a tiny fraction of an acre — were treated as though they were absentee landlords: They were shot."

In any event, a Communist takeover in the South today would be a far different proposition. After some 16 years of bitter war and hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides, the population in the South is overwhelmingly anti-Communist. It will resist a Communist takeover as long as it has the means to do so. And the Communists—who already have used every conceivable form of brutality against unarmed civilians in this war—will most certainly not be suddenly merciful in their moment of victory.

We have had examples enough already of what could be expected. A far more relevant portent is what happened in Hue in the course of the 1968 Tet offensive. The Communist forces held the city from Jan. 31 to Feb. 24 that year. And still today, mass graves are being discovered that so far have yielded more than 3,000 civilians who had been clubbed or shot to death.

The same thing on a lesser scale has happened in countless villages throughout South Vietnam where the North Vietnamese have temporarily taken over control. The Communists have provided far too many demonstrations of their techniques of population control in Vietnam and elsewhere to permit any illusions about what would happen if they came to power in Saigon.

To be sure, the armchair experts who proclaim that predictions of a bloodbath in Vietnam are a myth don't have much to worry about. If their predictions turn out to be regrettably inaccurate, they will be a comfortable 8,000 miles away from any unpleasantness. And it is very unlikely that anyone will be able to say with real assurance how many were killed.